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Reply to: Tampa, FL

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**"OPERATION SOUTHERN COMFORT" SWEEPS NUMEROUS
ALLEGED DRUG DEALERS OFF THE STREETS OF SUMTER COUNTY**

A four month investigation into the activities of local drug dealers, code named "Operation Southern Comfort," culminated today in an early morning sweep as dozens of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents, U.S. Marshals, Sumter County Sheriff's deputies, as well as police officers from the cities of Wildwood, Webster, Coleman, Center Hill and Bushnell fanned out and arrested several individuals who have been federally indicted on charges of distribution of "crack" cocaine and conspiracy to distribute "crack" cocaine. A total of 22 individuals are facing federal indictments and 19 others are charged with state drug offenses. Those arrested on federal charges will make their initial appearances in the U.S. District Court in Ocala this afternoon. Detention and bond hearings for the defendants will likely take place next week on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Starting in late November of last year through mid-March of this year the special agents of DEA's Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) worked with the Sumter County Sheriff's Office and local police in an undercover operation focusing on street level drug dealers throughout Sumter County. The DEA Mobile Enforcement Team deploys throughout the state to assist local agencies who are trying to stop the flow of illegal drug trafficking at the street level.

Sumter County Sheriff William O. Farmer applauded the federal agents and local law enforcement officers who teamed up for this investigation and stated: "Sumter County is a beautiful rural community where you can raise a family, however, we can not and will not

ignore the infiltration of illegal drugs and their effect. “Operation Southern Comfort” and future investigations will make it very uncomfortable for those who push illegal drugs in our community.”

United States Attorney Paul I. Perez also praised the team of investigators and stated: “Sheriff Farmer has been a great partner in this effort to get those who pedal illegal drugs off the streets of Sumter County. The Sheriff as well as the Chiefs of Police throughout Sumter County, are working hard to make this a safer community.”

These cases will be prosecuted by a team of Assistant United States Attorneys from the Jacksonville Office of the United States Attorney’s Office, who are members of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) for the Middle District of Florida.

An Indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.

The following agencies and representatives participated in today’s press conference:

Sumter County Sheriff’s Office - Sheriff William O. Farmer

Bushnell Police Department - Chief Eddie Lovett

Center Hill Police Department - Chief Steve Allen

Coleman Public Safety - Chief Billy Smith

Webster Police Department - Chief Dennis Johnson

Wildwood Police Department - Chief Don Clark

State Attorney’s Office - Skip Boll
Supervising Assistant State Attorney

DEA Mobile Enforcement Team - Randy Bohman
Assistant Special Agent in Charge

United States Attorney’s Office - Brian Kane
Managing Assistant United States Attorney
D. Rodney Brown
Assistant United States Attorney